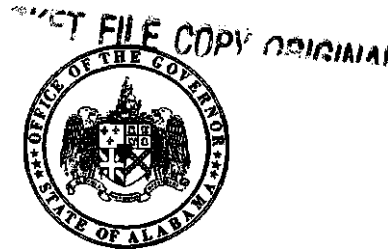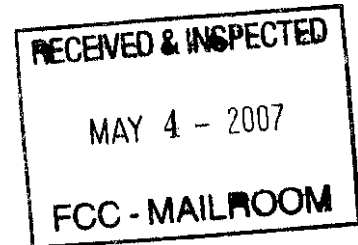OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

BOB RILEY
GOVERNOR

STATE CAPITOL
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130

(334) 242-7100
FAX: (334) 242-0937

STATE OF ALABAMA

May 2, 2007

Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
c/o Natek, Inc.
236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
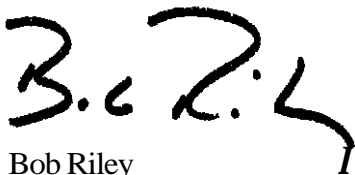Suite 110
Washington, DC 20002

Dear **Mr.** Secretary:

The State **of** Alabama is pleased to support the enclosed application submitted in response to the recent FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Program solicitation. This project is **one** of several that **will be** assisted and coordinated by **the** Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs – Energy, Weatherization and Technology (ADECA-**EWT**) Division in a major initiative to develop a statewide telecommunications network **for** rural health in Alabama

Physician **shortages** and/or lack **of** transportation resources currently make it difficult for residents to receive adequate healthcare in the rural areas of our state. This initiative is essential to our efforts to *make* **appropriate** health *care* accessible **to all** citizens in Alabama

Your favorable consideration **of** this **request** is greatly appreciated.
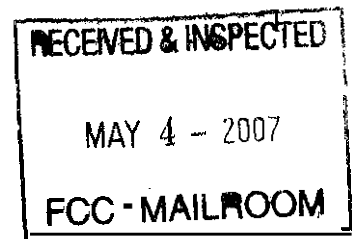
Sincerely,

Bob Riley

BR/gd

FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Program

FCC Docket Number WC Docket No. 02-60

Applicant: DCH Health System, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

What specific activities are proposed for funding?

The project will connect the Pickens County Medical Center in Carrollton located in rural Pickens County and the Fayette Medical Center located in Fayette in rural Fayette County to the DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa. DCH is the regional hospital in the west Alabama area and provides specialized services to the rural hospitals in Carrollton and Fayette. Pickens, Fayette and Tuscaloosa counties are contiguous, with Pickens County located in the designated Black Belt region of Alabama.

Specific activities include installing a new broadband fiber network between the Fayette Medical Center and DCH Regional Medical Center via Winfield and Jasper (see attached map). The project also includes upgrading the fiber network linking the Pickens County Medical Center to the Fayette Medical Center. The project will provide needed bandwidth between Carrollton and Fayette and between Fayette and Tuscaloosa. The network will have video, internet and T1 lines. The project will connect to the public internet. Following a statewide study, it is anticipated that it will connect to either Internet2 or NLR.

What is the strategy for leveraging existing technology to adopt the most efficient and cost effective means of connecting those providers?

Pickens County Medical Center and Fayette Medical Center currently send ultrasound, CT, MRI and routine diagnostic tests over T1 lines using PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication Systems) to DCH Regional Medical Center. Pickens hospital plans to expand use of their PACS system for nuclear medicine, mammography and endoscopy. PACS are computers or networks dedicated to the storage, retrieval, distribution and presentation of images. PACS handle images from various modalities, such as ultrasonography, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), positron emission tomography, computed tomography (CT), endoscopy, mammography and radiography (plain X-rays).

PACS replaces hard-copy based means of managing medical images, such as film archives. It expands on the possibilities of such conventional systems by providing capabilities of off-site viewing and reporting (distance education, tele-diagnosis). Additionally, it enables practitioners at various physical locations to access the same information simultaneously (teleradiology). With the decreasing price of digital storage, PACS systems provide a growing cost and space advantage over film archives.

DCH in Tuscaloosa has radiologists and other specialists on duty **24** hours a day to interpret and diagnose patients for the rural hospitals. The T1 lines currently provide minimal performance

for images. The project will give rural hospitals real time information needed to determine the extent of patients' conditions. Broadband fiber would speed delivery of tests and provide better detail and resolution to the images.

The cost of local connectivity has been low enough that DCH Regional Medical Center has been able to increase bandwidth to Northport Medical Center up to 100MB at a reasonable price. The cost for similar speeds at Fayette Medical Center have been difficult to obtain and way too expensive to purchase. We have recently added Fayette Medical Center to our electronic medical records system which is storing all paper records at DCH which is straining our bandwidth capacity.

What is the source of financial support and anticipated revenues that will pay the 15% matching funds for this project? Identify the organization that will be legally and financially responsible for the conduct of activities supported by the fund.

This will be a joint project between DCH Health System and the Pickens County Medical Center. DCH Health System is the applicant for the grant funds. Each hospital in the network is a non-profit organization; there are no for-profit organizations at this time.

Identify the goals and objectives of the proposed network.

The goal of the project is to improve medical service delivery to patients in rural areas. The primary objective to accomplish this goal is to develop a broadband telecommunications network that will carry diagnostic and other medical services over wired facilities using real time video and audio between the regional hospital in Tuscaloosa and the two rural hospitals in Pickens and Fayette counties. Another objective is to enhance the network with video, internet, and TI capabilities. A third objective is to reduce the amount of time required to communicate tests and test results between medical facilities.

Provide the address, zip code, Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code and phone number for each health care facility participating in the network.

Pickens County Medical Center (public, non-profit), 241 Robert K. Wilson Drive, Carrollton, AL 35447, RUCA Code #10.0, 205/367-8111

Fayette Medical Center (public, non-profit), 1653 Temple Avenue N., Fayette, AL 35555, RUCA Code #7.0, 205/932-1104

DCH Regional Medical Center (public, non-profit), 809 University Blvd. E., Tuscaloosa, AL 35401, RUCA Code #1.0, 205/759-7111

Indicate previous experience in developing and managing telemedicine programs.

DCH Regional Medical Center came up live on the Meditech HIS system in December of 1991. Northport Medical Center and Fayette Medical Center were added to the network in 1995. At that time, all clinical and financial services were run from DCH for all three locations.

Connectivity between the facilities has continued to grow as new applications have been added in Meditech, non-Meditech applications, internet, email, and most recently PACS.

Pickens County Medical Center has been associated with the DCH Health System since 2002 during which time DCH has migrated over a number of their key clinical and financial applications to run from DCH similar to Fayette Medical Center. Plans are to try to move even more of the servers and applications still resident at Pickens County Medical Center to DCH. We are also experiencing the same challenges in obtaining higher bandwidth for Pickens as we *are* at Fayette. Both are serviced by a different telecommunications company, CenturyTel, than DCH and Northport (which *are* serviced by Bellsouth).

All facilities are growing in their need to share data, applications, and services with ever higher needs for bandwidth while facing the challenge of the high cost to obtain these services in rural areas. This can ultimately limit some services that can be provided for the remote facilities.

In 2001-2002 the Pickens County Medical Center was a partner in a project sponsored by the Pickens County Board of Education to expand the school board's telecommunications network to the school system's technology center, the Pickens County Medical Center, three medical clinics in Aliceville, one clinic in Gordo, and one clinic in Reform by installing fiber optic cable.

One of the goals of the project was to provide for telemedicine capability among the various medical facilities. The Pickens County Medical Center and clinics use the link to display patients' medical records and patients' laboratory results. The Medical Center is linked to the county jail for diagnosing inmates. The link between the Medical Center and the school technology center made it possible to teach health courses at the technology center from the Pickens County Medical Center. It also enabled the Medical Center to send video to the outlying medical clinics.

Leadership/Management/Strategy Plan

The project's leadership includes Bill Cassels, Administrator, DCH Regional Medical Center; Wayne McElroy, Administrator, Pickens County Medical Center; and Harold Reed, Administrator, Fayette Medical Center.

The DCH Health System operates DCH Regional Medical Center, Northport Medical Center and Fayette Medical Center. DCH Health System has a management agreement with the Pickens County Medical Center.

Both DCH Health System and the Pickens County Medical Center have a Three-Year Strategy Plan for applications and technology that is updated annually and approved by the administrative staff.

Segments of the existing fiber optic network between Carrollton and Fayette *are* owned and maintained by different entities, i.e., Northland Television Company, Northwest Cable Company, and the Pickens County Board of Education. The new fiber optic network between

Fayette and Tuscaloosa will be owned and maintained by the vendor that gets the bid for the project.

Project Schedule

Grant award
Advertise/bid the project – 60 days
Evaluation of bids – 30 days
Construction – 90 days

Budget

Location	One-Time Installation	Monthly Charge (1GB)	Total First Year
Fayette	$ 1,500	$ 3,000 X 12 months = $36,000	$ 37,500
Carrollton	$ 1,500	$3,000 X 12 months = $36,000	$ 37,500
Tuscaloosa*	$ 9,500	$3,000 X 12 months = $36,000	$ 45,500
cost	$12,500	$9,000 X 12 months = $108,000	$120,500

 *Cost for installation at Tuscaloosa includes an electronic switch.

Source: Estimates are based on costs supplied by vendors with services in these areas.

FCC Grant	$102,425
15% Match	18,075
Total	$120,500

Indicate how the telemedicine program will be coordinated throughout the state or region. What is the strategy for aggregating the specific needs of health care providers, including providers in rural areas?

This project is part of Phase 1 of a statewide telecommunications plan that will be coordinated through Alabama's 12 regional councils. Phase 2 will include a survey of existing facilities and services as well as immediate and future needs of health care providers and recipients in the state, both rural and urban. The goal is to have a regional telecommunications network in each region and link them into a statewide network. It will be managed through a series of memoranda of agreement among the regional councils. The technology division of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs will oversee the plan.

Indicate to what extent the network can be self-sustaining once established.

Funds are currently budgeted for lower bandwidth connectivity between the three campuses which will be used to fund the new fiber network. Each of the campuses depends on the data network for key business and clinical functions, so connectivity will have to be maintained in

whatever manner is available. A high speed data network is vastly superior to the current connectivity and will be funded and maintained.

What is the extent to which rural health care providers are included in the network?
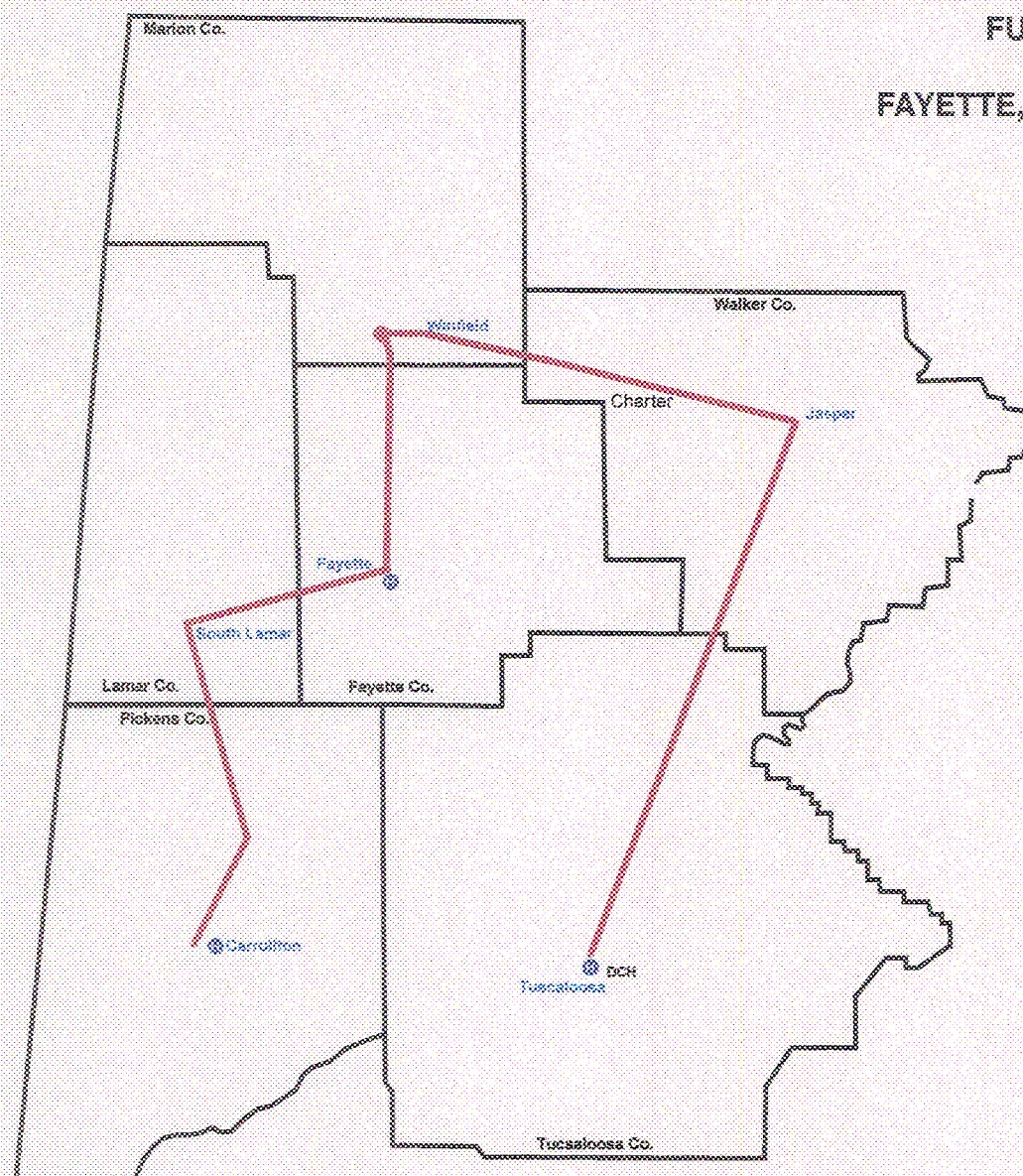
Both the Pickens County Medical Center and the Fayette Medical Center are located in rural counties in west Alabama. Pickens County is one of Alabama's Black Belt counties, an area targeted by this grant program.

Pickens County has a 2000 census population of 20,949. The Pickens County Hospital Association, a public board, owns the Pickens County Medical Center. The Pickens County Medical Center has had a management agreement with the DCH Health System since 2002 whereby DCH provides an administrator to oversee the hospital's operations. The 56-bed facility currently has 19 specialists on the medical staff in cardiology, gastroenterology, urology, oncology, ophthalmology, podiatry, orthopedics, dermatology, family medicine, internal medicine, emergency medicine and radiology. According to a 2005 statistical review there were 1,597 patients admitted, 9,844 visits to the emergency room, 20,447 outpatient visits, and 341 surgeries. The medical center employs 287 people.

Fayette County has a 2000 census population of 18,495. The Fayette Medical Center consists of a 61-bed hospital and a 122-bed nursing home. Specialties include cardiology, oncology, urology, orthopedics, neurology, ophthalmology, otolaryngology, nephrology, rheumatology, and plastic surgery. According to a 2005 statistical review, the Fayette County Medical Center admitted 1,583 people, had 16,541 emergency visits, 36,803 outpatient visits, and 1,205 surgeries. There are 10 physicians on staff with 386 employees.

Tuscaloosa County has a 2000 census population of 164,875. DCH Regional Medical Center operates specialty units for pediatrics, orthopedics, cancer and cardiology, advanced trauma center and intensive care units. According to a 2005 statistical review there were 23,850 patients admitted, 70,374 emergency visits, 287,451 outpatient visits. They have 583 licensed beds, 3,350 employees, and 248 physicians on staff.

FUTURE HOSPITAL NETWORK
FOR
FAYETTE, CARROLLTON and TUSCALOOSA

Marion Co.

Walker Co.

Winfield

Charter

Jasper

Fayette

South Lamar

Lamar Co.

Fayette Co.

Pickens Co.

Carrollton

Tuscaloosa   DCH

Tuscaloosa Co.

Legend
Fiber to DCH